

Balkan Nationalists Peddling Fascism

by Howard Goldenthal and Russ Bellant

In the hyperbole accompanying the political transformation in Europe, some ugly side effects have been overlooked. Rightwing political activity reminiscent of the early part of the century is finding an audience again.

Iron Guard Redux in Romania

Last March, Moses Rosen, Romania's chief Rabbi, traveled to Washington with an urgent request. In the Romanian city of Tirgu Mures, pogroms were being directed against the Hungarian minority. Six Hungarians had been killed. Rosen asked the State Department to prevent the exit from the U.S. of Romanian exiles who were returning home to foment old hatreds—hatreds typified by the Iron Guard.

To older Romanians and students of European history, the legacy of the Iron Guard is truly grotesque. Its members were responsible for violence so savage that they reputedly offended the Nazis. Forty-five years later, young toughs describing themselves as Iron Guardists were taking credit for the murders in Tirgu Mures. According to Cazimir Ionescu, then vice-president for the socialist National Salvation Front, an Iron Guard propaganda campaign had been under way since the December overthrow of Ceausescu.¹

At the time of the Tirgu Mures violence, interim president Petre Roman expelled three Romanian-Canadians for promoting fascist ideas. One of those expelled was George Belasu, well known in the Romanian community in the West as editor of the pro-Iron Guard *Romanian Voice*. The Hamilton, Ontario based paper supports Valerian Trifa, head of a faction of the Romanian Orthodox Church dominated by Iron Guardists.² Trifa fled the U.S. in 1984 after the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations found evidence implicating him in a Bucharest pogrom in 1941.³

Good press is not the only support such groups are receiving from the West. *Vatra Romanesca*, an extreme-right organization including Iron Guardists recently boasted it had financial backing from "influential political figures at home, [and] several more or less clandestine organizations abroad, particularly French and Canadian ones."⁴

Iron Guardists are also part of the leadership of the National Christian Peasants Party. The NCPP is virulently nativist and anti-Semitic, and has been linked to violence against Hungarian farmers.⁵

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1. *Toronto Star*, March 21, 1990.

2. *Toronto Star*, March 23, 1990.

3. Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta, "Warm Praise for Heroes," *Washington Post*, September 7, 1986.

4. From *Vatra Romanesca*'s "Secret Program Statement," of February 20, 1990. Hungarian Human Rights Foundation transcript.

5. *Newsweek*, May 7, 1990.

Ethnic Separatism Returns to Czechoslovakia

Slovakian exiles in Canada are playing a key role in trying to bring about a separate Slovak republic modeled on the one formed in March 1939 by the extreme-right cleric and Nazi collaborator Jozef Tiso. Tiso oversaw the transportation of thousands of Slovak Jews to German death camps. He was executed in 1947 by the non-communist government of Edward Benes. Some of Tiso's friends were more fortunate: assisted by the Vatican and U.S. and British intelligence, many former officials of the collaborationist Hlinka party were smuggled west, and quietly renewed their political activities.⁶

In 1971, uranium magnate Steve Roman formed the Slovak World Congress in Toronto with the help of Hlinka collaborators like Ferdinand Durcansky, the Nazi Foreign Minister sentenced to death for treason and his underling Jozef Kirschbaum, on the run from a 20-year sentence for his role as Secretary General of the party.⁷ The Vatican has maintained its close connections with the Hlinka front group. In 1984, while on a visit to Canada, Pope John Paul II took time out of his busy schedule to visit Roman's Cathedral located just outside of Toronto.⁸ Roman died in 1988.

Last March, Rev. Dusan Toth, Secretary General of the Slovak World Congress, addressed a crowd of nearly 100,000 supporters in Bratislava.⁹ Toth, former head of Protestant religious programming for Radio Free Europe, found rightist separatism still a potent force in Slovakia.¹⁰ Elsewhere, Toth's message and activities would be considered a threat to national security, but last February, Toth was appointed a member of a group of foreign advisers to President Vaclav Havel.¹¹

Last May, Alexander Dubcek, Havel's vice president visited Toronto and attended a meeting of the Slovak World Congress. Dubcek, a Slovak, is best known as the leader of Czechoslovakia's Prague Spring in 1968. Dubcek's liberalization program was smashed when Moscow ordered troops into Prague and the government was overthrown.

Another Nazi collaborator and separatist who came back from the West looking for a state, was Ivo Omrcanin, an official during the war with the Foreign Ministry of the state of Independent Croatia. After the war, Omrcanin helped other Nazis, including Ustasha president Ante Pavelic and Klaus

6. Confidential report by historian Alti Rodal for the Deschenes Commission Inquiry into War Criminals in Canada, 1985.

7. Paul McKay, "The Kirschbaum File," [Ontario] *Kingston Whig-Standard Magazine*, December 10, 1988.

8. Transcript of the address by Pope John Paul II to a meeting with the Slovak Community of the Byzantine Rite, Unionville, Ontario, September 15, 1984, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

9. Genya Intransor, "Welcome for an Exiled Hero," *Toronto Sun*, March 25, 1990.

10. Jack Anderson and Joseph Spear, "Appointees' Tie to Slovak Group Studied," *Washington Post*, July 22, 1986.

11. *Op. cit.*, n. 9.

Barbie, escape to Latin America.¹² While in the U.S., Omrcanin took part in events sponsored by the quasi-Nazi Institute for Historical Review.¹³

In an interview with the Yugoslav magazine *ST*, Omrcanin said he had returned to Croatia to register a new political party; he blamed Jews for massacres against Croats during the war; he claimed Jasenovac, a concentration camp set up to handle Jews and Serbs, was a Hollywood production. "You can see how big of an imagination these Jews have when they make cartoons. Those are all made by Jews."¹⁴

Separatist Organizing in the Ukraine

Rightwing separatists have become active in the Ukraine with help from Ukrainian Americans. As in the 1930s, the separatist banner is carried by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). During the war, the OUN collaborated with the Nazi occupation politically and militarily, and participated in the elimination of Ukrainian Jews.¹⁵

After the war, OUN militants were recruited to carry out a clandestine war against the U.S.S.R. Others found their way to the West, where they resumed political activity. Since the war, the OUN has been the backbone of the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations (ABN), a coalition including the Iron Guard and the Hlinka party. The OUN and the ABN have been leading public opponents to the Office of Special Investigations.¹⁶

For the young, OUN has a new organization called the Union of Independent Ukrainian Youth, inspired by the wartime OUN leader Stepan Bandera.¹⁷

In addition, rightwing Ukrainian-Americans were involved in the March elections. Askold Lozynskij, general counsel for the OUN-dominated Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, and other activists were sent by the Washington-based Free Congress Foundation (FCF).¹⁸

Hungary's Arrow Cross

The FCF was also involved in the March elections in Hungary. In a bitter contest, the Democratic Forum, the party which would eventually win the contest, used anti-semitic slurs against its rival, the Alliance of Free Democrats.¹⁹ Aid for the Forum has come from far-right Hungarians exiled in the U.S. including Laszlo Pasztor, a youth leader of the Arrow Cross during the Second World War.²⁰ The Arrow Cross was Hungary's Nazi party which came to power in 1944. Pasztor

served five years in a Hungarian prison after the war for his wartime activities at the Hungarian embassy in Berlin.

A Nazi past proved no great obstacle to success in the U.S. Pasztor was selected by Richard Nixon in 1969 to recruit rightists from other Eastern European communities to work for the Republican party. Some of those recruited were committed Nazis. One of them, Boleslavs Maikovkis, a former Latvian police officer, was accused by the Office of Special Investigations of being a war criminal.²¹ In 1988, Pasztor was one of six members of the Bush election committee forced to resign because of their Nazi affiliations.²²

Pasztor now directs the FCF's East European activities. He has also advised the National Endowment for Democracy on funding Hungarian political parties. The FCF sent a team to Hungary to teach the Democratic Forum election techniques.²³

Latvian Activities

Only recently have far-right activists managed to get into the Soviet Bloc. In October 1988, the Soviet Union prevented Latvian exiles from Canada and the U.S. from attending the founding convention of the Latvian People's Front. One of those prevented from boarding the plane was Linards Lukss, chair of the World Federation of Free Latvians.²⁴

Lukss, a Toronto physician, is well known in anticommunist circles. He is the president of the Captive Nations Committee in Canada, an organization closely affiliated with the ABN.

Lukss's cleverest accomplishment to date was to help found the International Black Ribbon Day Committee in 1986, a Toronto-based operation which is officially opposed to both Nazism and Communism, but welcomes the support and participation of the Hlinka-dominated Slovak World Congress, the OUN-dominated World Congress of Free Ukrainians, and the far-right Hungarian Freedom Fighters World Federation.²⁵

Why?

Whether the political activities of these organizations and individuals will gain a following in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union is debatable. What the U.S. seeks by promoting them ought to be subject to open debate. The silence is deafening. ●

12. Christopher Simpson, *Blowback* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1988), p. 185.

13. Omrcanin writes for the Institute for Historical Review publication *Journal for Historical Review*, and is a member of the editorial board.

14. "Ustasha Accuses the Jews" (Yugoslavia) *Politika*, March 17, 1990.

15. Scott and Jon Lee Anderson, *Inside the League* (New York: Dodd Meade, 1986).

16. Russ Bellant, *Old Nazis, the New Right and the Reagan Administration*, second edition (Cambridge: Political Research Associates, 1989).

17. *New York Times*, March 26, 1990.

18. Liz Twardon, *Detroit News*, February 26, 1990.

19. Patrick Barnard, "Does Tomorrow Belong to Them?," *The Nation*, July 30/August 6, 1990.

20. Randolph Braham, "Boring From Within," *Midstream*, June-July 1989.

21. David Lee Preston, "Nazi Affiliated Emigres in the Republican Party," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 18, 1988.

22. "Sixth Aide Quits Bush Ethnic Coalition," AP, September 14, 1988.

23. Chip Berlet and Holly Sklar, "Harbinger of Democracy," *The Nation*, April 2, 1990.

24. Nicolas Van Rijn, "Soviets Cancel Latvian Exile's Visit to Capitol," *Toronto Star*, October 9, 1988.

25. "Peace With Freedom," *Canadian Black Ribbon Day Newsletter*, November 1986.